

SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

REPORT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE 61ST ANNUAL CONFERENCE

held at
CONWAY HALL, RED LION SQUARE, W.C.1, on FRIDAY, SATURDAY & SUNDAY,
16th, 17th and 18th April, 1965

Attendances at Conference:-

	<u>Delegates Present</u>	<u>Branches Represented</u>
First day	31	17
Second day	29	17
Third day	31	16

All Branches were represented at some time during the Conference.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT:

<u>Income</u>		<u>Expenditure</u>	
<u>Collections:</u>		Conway Hall Hire	£57.15. 6
Friday	£14. 3. 0	Caretaker	£ 5. 0. 0
" Meeting	£18. 0. 0	Band	£18. 6. 0
Saturday	£ 8.14. 0	Raffle	£ 4. 6. 9
Sunday	£ 5.10. 0	Printing Dance	
		Tickets	£ 1. 7. 6
Donations	£ 7. 0. 0	Delegates' Expenses	£ 5. 0. 0
Profit from canteen	£13.16. 0		
Dance Tickets	£14.13. 6		
Raffle	£ 8. 8. 9		
	£90. 5. 3		£91. 9. 3

SESSION

Comrades George and Phillips were elected as Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively and it was agreed that Standing Orders Committee act as Tellers.

It was agreed to take Amendments to Rules in the afternoon when a maximum attendance was expected.

Branches, Membership & Organisation.

Resolution: Paddington: "This Conference reaffirms that, in keeping with our democratic principles, members of the public have free access to our Constitution, Rules and records (with the exception of Membership Lists) as they have to all our meetings, and instructs the E.C. to act accordingly in future".

The points raised in the discussion of this resolution were that in spite of the exception made of Membership Lists some members' names and addresses were bound to come to light and we had no authority for disclosing these without consent. It was thought that the resolution was unfortunate in that it lays down a definite ruling and that it was better to allow the E.C. some discretion in the matter. Others thought that it merely reaffirmed our democratic principles which should be adhered to.

CARRIED 21-14

Item for Discussion:

Wembley: "Reforming the Constitution of the E.C.". Wembley felt that there is a case for cutting down the size of the E.C. and that consideration should be given as to whether it is necessary to meet once a week. 14 members was disproportionate to the size of the Party. A smaller E.C. would free comrades for other work and much of the work now dealt with by the E.C. could be delegated to Committees. On the other hand, some delegates felt that E.C. work could not be kept up-to-date except with weekly meetings and that 14 members were necessary to allow sufficiently wide discussion. There was no resolution put forward on this.

Item for Discussion:

Wood Green & Hornsey: "The Next Five Years". Wood Green & Hornsey stressed the Party's difficulty in getting in touch with the majority of workers because of the power of Press, radio and television etc. and our virtual exclusion from this media, and stated that the Party should concentrate on appealing to workers of a higher level of intelligence and to the more politically interested.

Birmingham Branch stated that they felt that much good socialist material was to be found amongst youngsters and that more effort should be made to get in touch with them.

A suggestion was made by Birmingham Branch that the Party should consider setting up its own printing unit - we are printing at the moment in the most expensive way. The purchase of small litho machines coupled with an electric typewriter for the production of the "S.S.", leaflets etc. internally would work out cheaper. Full particulars will be sent to the Printing Committee.

West Ham Branch pointed out that these machines were not suitable for Party work - there would still be considerable folding and stitching to be done. As the difficulty here appeared to be a technical one it was agreed that the Printing Committee should thoroughly investigate the matter when particulars are to hand.

Resolution: Paddington: "This Conference is in favour of the Party paying a member or members to do the necessary research and preparation to produce booklets and pamphlets".

CARRIED 20-18 with little discussion.

Resolution: Bloomsbury: "That the E.C. be instructed to explore the possibilities of employing a comrade as a full-time paid research worker and writer, and that steps be taken to establish a fund reserved solely for the payment of this comrade".

CARRIED 22-18 with little discussion.

AMENDMENTS TO RULE: These were all lost with little discussion.

Parties Abroad: Greetings. At this stage greetings were read from the S.P. of Ireland, S.P. of Australia (Melbourne), S.P. of Canada, and the S.P. of New Zealand, together with greetings and an interesting letter from Com. Frank in Vienna. Com. Orner of the W.S.P. (here on a visit) gave a short address in which he said that one of the main factors holding up the spread of socialist ideas in America is the effect on workers of the "McCarthy incident" of 1963 - the American people are still very scared of the authorities. He felt, however, that the extreme right wing groups are beginning to lose their grip and there was every reason for optimism.

Com. Fenton (official delegate of the W.S.P. U.S) then gave the Conference greetings from the W.S.P. and expressed his great personal pleasure at being with Conference on this his first visit to Europe.

Resolution: Islington: "This Conference instructs the E.C. to modernise and extend Head Office Library, including the Tape Library, and provide up-to-date equipment".

Islington Branch had no criticism to make of the existing library but felt it should be modernised by cutting out some of the "out-of-date" volumes and purchase such current and useful material as the Millner-Holland Report. The Branch also felt that the Tape Library should be an adjunct to the book library. Some system of getting back borrowed tapes was needed and there should be a balanced stream of lectures copied at a reasonable cost and catalogued.

Regarding Birmingham's addendum: "That Branches be supplied with a Head Office Library List", it was pointed out that this would not serve a very useful purpose; it would be better if all new books added to the Library were notified to Branches. Comrade Williams, Librarian, told the Conference that insufficient use was made of the Library by members.

Islington's Resolution, with Birmingham's Addendum was:

CARRIED 19-14

Floor Resolution: Lewisham: "That this Conference recommends to the E.C. that the Librarian be requested to regularly circularise the Branches regarding any new additions to the Library".

CARRIED 14-3

Literature.

Resolution: Islington: "This Conference instructs the E.C. to extend the publication of new Pamphlets". This was CARRIED 23-10 with little discussion.

There was some discussion of Paddington's resolution instructing the E.C. to prepare new pamphlets or booklets on War, Education, Automation & Technology, Labour Government and the Urban Problem - combined with Swansea's Addendum suggesting pamphlets on Neurosis - its Cause and Cure and A Socialist Analysis of History.

Com. May (Paddington) stated that the income from pamphlets this year was small. We were completely out of stock of the War Pamphlet which is a most important one. He felt that "A Socialist Analysis of History" was too large a project for the Party to undertake at the moment. Com. Grant stressed the need for filling in the gaps in our pamphlets for propaganda purposes - our present "Labour Government" is out of date and the "S.S" dealing with Automation was sold out.

The vote was taken on each of these suggested Pamphlets and following only were carried:-

War
Automation & Technology
The Urban Problem and How we Live Today
A Socialist Analysis of History

30-7 2d. 10 2d.
22-14 2d. 10 2d.
19-16 19-16 2d.
17-16 2d. 14-16

The Chairman pointed out that a pamphlet on War is in course of preparation, a Pamphlet on Education is under consideration and that a new Pamphlet on Russia will shortly appear.

Resolution (Paddington): "This Conference instructs the E.C. to investigate the possibility of producing the new Russian Pamphlet in paper-back form at a price of, say, 3/- or 3/6d. to enable wider distribution and sale through bookshops etc. who are unwilling to accept low-priced Pamphlets".

Com. Grant (Paddington) stated that there is a growth of serious reading matter in booklet (paper-back) form and pointed out the difficulty the Party is always faced with in distributing our Pamphlets. 1/- Pamphlets which are not in booklet form are not acceptable commercially by bookshops.

CARRIED 37-1

Item for Discussion:

Camberwell: "Are we Making the best use of the "S.S." Front Page?"

There was some discussion as to the value of illustrations on the front cover of the "S.S.", and whether they should be coloured or black and white. It was thought by one member that the picture on the front cover gave the impression that the "S.S." was devoted to one subject only. Com. Grant (Paddington) stated that the sales of the "S.S." at Colletts Bookshop, Charing Cross Road, where the "S.S." competed with many other political journals, showed a consistent climb and that the picture on the cover was an asset, whether coloured or otherwise. One or two comrades advocated the use of the "Red Flag" on the cover as shown on the cover of the September 1964 Anniversary issue, but a member of the S.S. Production Committee pointed out that this had involved an infringement of copyright and could not be used again.

Publicity

Resolution: Islington: "This Conference instructs the E.C. to spend more money on advertising the "S.S." and Party literature".

Comrade Ambridge, Swansea, was in favour of the Party spending more money on advertising, that it should be modernised and "experts" employed. The advertising of the "S.S.", which is our main source of propaganda, should be given absolute priority by the E.C. Com. May, Central Organiser, stressed the fact that "experts" in advertising would not be interested in the advertising of the "S.S." and that the cost in any case would be prohibitive. They could not tell us anything we ourselves did not know about advertising. Comrade Lake, Treasurer, stated that the Party should bear in mind that the politically interested were not concentrated in one spot but scattered over a wide area of the country and that we were getting the best results we could hope for by advertising in small local papers. The Publicity Committee are spending as much money as they could cope with at the moment as regards results. He thought it was a mistake to give the E.C. definite instructions to put money aside for this purpose.

Comrade Bradley, Publicity Committee, was in favour of the Party spending more money on advertising but pointed out that large and therefore more expensive advertisements cut down frequency. We should spend more time and thought to spreading out advertisements in various small journals.

Islington's resolution, as amended by Camberwell - "This Conference instructs the E.C. to investigate the possibility of improving the advertising of the "S.S" and Party literature" was:

CARRIED 19-11

SATURDAY SESSION:

Propaganda.

Resolution: Glasgow: "This Conference instructs the E.C. to appoint a full-time Propaganda Organiser, and that this Propaganda Organiser be an experienced speaker whose job it is to hold meetings indoor and out, contact members and sympathisers in those areas where there is the possibility of forming a Branch, or assisting a Branch which has a lack of speakers".

Comrade Vanni, Glasgow, said that a full-time organiser to arrange indoor and outdoor meetings could do invaluable work touring such places as Oldham, Salford, Sale, Leeds and Newcastle, contacting sympathisers and scattered members, and break new ground. Comrade Zucconi, of the Propaganda Committee, said he was not opposed to this idea in principle but felt we should give priority to spending money on pamphlets and literature. Comrade Baldwin, E.C. member, thought it was time the Party employed a full-time propagandist; work on a voluntary and spare-time basis was not enough.

Comrade May, Central Organiser, was against the resolution (though not in principle). He pointed out that a previous full-time paid organiser had been to districts around Glasgow and Bradford but today in these areas there is no Branch or Group. In Manchester and Liverpool considerable work has already been done yet today there is no Branch or activity there. In Nottingham there is very little activity in spite of good meetings. The matter of employing a full-time paid organiser is not as simple as it looks. It would cost £1,000 a year, which could not be met by collections. We could only employ him for part of the year. It would need a comrade who was single, with no ties, and who was very enthusiastic. It would be better to pay two comrades to go to these places for, say, two weeks in the summer months and pay their expenses. Glasgow Branch, winding up, pointed out that their Branch is already doing considerable work in and around Glasgow but in the winter they found it impossible to get an audience at indoor meetings. It needed someone who was on the spot and they were convinced that someone could be found for the job.

LOST 17-24

Floor Resolution: "That this Conference recommends the E.C. to investigate the possibility of appointing at least two paid speakers during the summer months to carry out propaganda work in London and the Provinces".

CARRIED 19-9

Other points made regarding propaganda were that we should concentrate on filling a small hall rather than a large one - it was discouraging to speak in a large half-empty hall, and that it was more important to hold frequent regular meetings say, once a week, so that people would know that on a certain day of the week there would always be an S.P.G.B. meeting to go to.

Islington's Resolution
instructs the E.C.
to investigate the
possibility of
improving the
advertising of
the "S.S" and
Party literature

Paddington's Resolution, as amended by Paddington: "This Conference instructs the E.C. to extend and enlarge every avenue of propaganda, particularly the holding of a series of well-prepared indoor meetings in London and the Provinces" was:

CARRIED 29-9

Resolution: Camberwell: "That the E.C. be instructed to thoroughly investigate speaking strength throughout the Party with a view to expanding Provincial Propaganda".

Comrade Carter, Camberwell, mentioned Bloomsbury Branch's recent series of successful Sunday meetings at Scho Square, London, where there had been no lack of speakers and Chairmen for a series of 26 consecutive meetings. Comrade George, Bloomsbury, pointed out that a lot of work has been done recently in the Provinces, that the Propaganda Committee and the E.C. are well aware of the speaking strength of the Party. What is needed is more activity and organisation by the Branches.

CARRIED 36-3

Policy

Resolution: Glasgow: "This Conference reaffirms the Party's attitude to violence, viz. that only a democratically elected Socialist majority can introduce Socialism after the capture of the machinery of Government; violence will only be used in the event of a recalcitrant minority attempting to forcibly overthrow Socialism".

Comrade Vanni, Glasgow, said that the only reason we intend to capture the Forces of State and Parliament is in the event of an opposing minority trying to prevent the establishment of socialism and we should be prepared to use violence if necessary. This has always been the attitude of the Party and he quoted from the "S.S" of September 1924 in support of his contention.

Other views expressed were as follows:- Comrade Grant, Paddington, felt that the E.C.'s statement put the matter in a better perspective than the resolution of Glasgow. The assumption to use violence even by the majority, is becoming more and more called into question as the means to do violence are becoming more and more grotesque. The line that social change may take is unpredictable and he thought that a "recalcitrant minority" would be unlikely.

Comrade Ambridge, Swansea, said that if you admit the possibility of a recalcitrant minority then you have no alternative but to be prepared to use force or violence, whatever word you care to use.

Birmingham Branch was opposed to the resolution and also to the amendment by Paddington (which supported the E.C.'s statement) and insisted that Glasgow's resolution does not reaffirm the Party's position.

Comrade Fahy, Mid-Herts. Branch, pointed out that we were speaking about an entirely new situation and we cannot anticipate how the capitalist class will react. In the meantime it is important that speakers have an answer they can give from the platform. We should be content at the moment to say that we do not know. Comrade Zucconi, Propaganda Committee, stated that people who abhor the use of violence ignore history, where the privileged class has always held on to its position. To disagree with using violence leads to the position that there is no need to capture the State machine. If necessary, we should be prepared to show the capitalist class we would use violence.

Comrade Fenton of the W.S.P. U.S. pointed out that he was opposed to Glasgow's resolution on the grounds that any statement that has an absolutist context should be looked at with reservation, that there is a distinction in our literature between force and violence. We insist on democratic means, which implies the freest expression on the part of minorities. Their main difference with the S.P.G.B. however, was that the matter should not be one of conjecture.

Comrade Ormer, of the W.S.P. thought that when the working class become tired of the capitalist system they will be too intelligent to need advice from us. We could not presume to tell the workers at that time how they should act. Our movement is educational, to spread socialist knowledge.

Comrade McClatchie, in support of the E.C.'s statement, pointed out that violence in history has always meant dynamite etc. Force does not mean the same thing. In the E.C.'s statement the word "conjecture" is used because we cannot know but on present conditions we have made a reasonable conjecture.

Regarding the statement in the "S.S" of 1924, he said it should be remembered that there was a time in the Party's history when it was thought that 52% of the workers would perhaps be the majority. We know now that the mass of the people work largely as a mass and when the working-class accepts the Party's position it will be a mass movement. The point we are concerned with is that we should have some general statement for speakers on the platform. We are bound to resort to conjecture on the present. The E.C.'s statement gives the workers an answer they can understand.

Paddington's Amendment LOST 14-22
Glasgow's Resolution CARRIED 13-15

SUNDAY SESSION

Finance.

In reply to a question as to the present position of the Party in relation to activity, Com. Lake, Treasurer, stated that if members will keep their feet firmly on the ground we should be able to publish some of the pamphlets required and pay our way for a little time, but we have not got money to burn. We are still not paying our way but legacies have helped and with modest advertising we should be able to get through.

Comrade Gluck, Islington, suggested that the Party should aim at raising £800 or £1,000 a year and if possible, invest it. A member from Nottingham saw nothing wrong in putting money in the Bank and accepting interest but would draw the line at any further investment of money. On behalf of the Party Funds Organiser it was pointed out that to raise money it was always much better to have a definite scheme in mind. Bloomsbury Branch, when opposing the increase of dues, had stated that many members paid their dues monthly or quarterly and when dues have accumulated to a considerable sum members are more reluctant to pay them.

Resolution: Islington: "That this Conference states that any money owned by the S.P.G.B. shall not be used for the purpose of producing rent, interest and profit and therefore instructs the E.C. to take a Party Poll".

This was discussed at considerable length and the following points were raised:- That for 60 years the Party has never done this. Why have we changed our minds and where is it leading us? To be consistent, why not invest in a Building Society or in Gilt-edged? The Party's reputation is worth more than a small amount of interest which is, in any case, taxable.

This attitude was described as puritanical by some members who felt that in a capitalist world you cannot buy anything without taking part in exploitation. Comrade Critchfield, Wembley, said that this "puritanical attitude" is regarded by some members as

as opposed to the strength of the Party - to invest money is not modern but old-fashioned. He thought Party money should be used for propaganda and was opposed to putting money on deposit. Comrade Ambridge, Swansea, stated that the Party has a moral attitude - a socialist morality. There should be no question of a deposit account. Comrade Lawrence, Bloomsbury, said that there are certain aspects of capitalism that we cannot avoid being involved in but here is an opportunity to demonstrate that this is something in which we do not wish to be involved.

Comrade Hardy, E.C. member, spoke to reinforce one or two points already made. He said that the Party has taken a certain line in the past and we have criticised organisations because of their investment of money. It is regrettable that we have changed our line. It is true that workers, and capitalists, are living under capitalism but nevertheless, we have picked out certain people and condemned their actions - we condemn workers for some of the things they do under capitalism. It is difficult to draw lines but we do so on occasions. Members should think about what the Party has done in the past and whether it would not be worth while going on doing this. The Party has set a certain standard and people have respected it.

Resolution LOST 15-20

Islington's further resolution on the matter was also
LOST 20-20

Education

Resolution: Islington: "This Conference instructs the E.C. to make every endeavour to create interest among members and Branches in the forthcoming series of Educational Classes".

Comrade D'Arcy, Education Officer, stated that two classes will be run within the next six months, starting with a speakers' class, followed by an economics class. The Spring School, which was very successful this year, will be repeated in the autumn. He stressed the need for good attendance at these classes. The strength of the Party as regards speaking and writing is the measure of the knowledge of the membership. This aspect has been neglected over the past few years and he urged the E.C. and members to take the matter more seriously.

CARRIED 31-1

Parliamentary Activity.

Comrade Buick, Paddington, urged more participation in Local Elections. The new Greater London Council is now in existence. There is no £150 deposit and Local Elections get much wider publicity. Constituencies are now spread over a wider area and there will be less difficulty in getting ten signatories to sign the Nomination Paper. In the Provinces there is a local daily paper which gives good publicity to candidates and letters to these papers usually get published.

Swansea Branch pointed out that members in the Provinces face the difficulty of finding avenues for propaganda. Local papers are a great help.

Glasgow Branch were in favour of extending election activities if this is in accordance with the strength of the Party. The main reason for contesting elections is to judge the level of support we have in a particular area.

Comrade Lake, Treasurer, said he was reluctant to oppose the contesting of elections, but reminded members that the pattern of the Party's growth has changed over the years. In the early days there were several London Branches which had sufficient members to sign the Nomination Paper but today members are scattered; we are

recruiting members over a wider area which is extending continually. This is not a point of weakness but of strength in the Party's growth. Members should look at the matter from the point of view of building up a world organisation and not fall into the error of debating various small local issues.

Floor Resolution: Paddington: "This Conference recommends that the maximum number of Greater London Council Local Constituencies be contested by the Party in 1967 and recommends the E.C. to make all necessary investigations in good time".

CARRIED 20-10

Parties Abroad

Jamaican Pamphlet. The Overseas Contacts Secretary stated that the 'Jamaican' Pamphlet was unlikely to be re-printed in its present form; they are writing another one with the assistance of Comrade La Touche of the S.P.G.B, now living in the West Indies. She had hoped that the Pamphlet could be printed here as the standard of printing would be better. The Jamaican Group do not consider themselves big enough to publish pamphlets under their own name. Comrade McDowall, Pamphlets Committee, stated that it is far better for an organisation to stand on its own feet with help, if asked for, from the S.P.G.B. and that it was possible that if the Group imports something which presumably comes from the S.P.G.B. it might be more difficult for them to state their case as an independent organisation in Jamaica.

Australia. In reply to a question regarding Australia, the Chairman stated that, as reported in E.C. minutes, there appear to be certain differences of principle between Melbourne and members of Sydney Branch. Letters had been received from three members of Sydney Branch, defending their point of view and explaining their difficulties in Australia. The issue is still being discussed by the E.C.

Resolution: Ambridge (Swansea and Cottis (S.E. Essex): "That the Report to Conference be adopted". Agreed

Comrades Fenton and Orner of the W.S.P. of U.S. wound up the Conference. Comrade Fenton said how encouraging it had been to be with people who spoke the same language and how it had inspired him in continuing the fight for Socialism. Both comrades expressed the view that although the workers in the United States had not yet recovered from the effects of the McCarthy investigations there were signs that this was wearing off and we could hope that in the near future some people would be prepared to listen to our case and support the W.S.P. They looked forward to the day when a Conference of this size and spirit would be held in the W.S.P.

N.B. Please note that resolutions which were lost have not been included except where they gave rise to debate.